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Mrs Gillian Talbot
Headteacher
St Mary's C of E Primary School
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Dear Mrs Talbot

Short inspection of St Mary's C of E Primary School

Following my visit to the school on 28 February 2019, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be good in March 2015.

This school continues to be good.

The leadership team has maintained the good quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

The strengths in leadership and management that were identified at the last inspection have been maintained. You and your team share a clear vision and a passion to ensure that all the pupils in your care do well during their time at St Mary's school. You work effectively to ensure that every pupil has a rich and exciting range of experiences. Your pupils are at the heart of everything that you do. You and your fellow leaders clearly want the best for each pupil academically, socially and personally.

You have successfully built a team of high-quality teachers, teaching assistants and support staff. All staff share your commitment to delivering the school mission statement to 'develop the skills of an effective lifelong learner, build successful relationships, have clear Christian values and principles and live by them'. This was evident from talking with staff, pupils and governors.

The governing body is effective. Governors know the school well. They use a range of data, reports and first-hand information to check the school's overall effectiveness. They have regular training to improve the quality of their work and their knowledge about key aspects of their role. They are highly ambitious for the school. They support and challenge you and your staff well.

You, your governors and the leadership team have an accurate understanding of the

school's strengths and weaknesses. You have a clear plan in place to develop the school further. All leaders contribute to this planning process and work to achieve ambitious targets.

Staff morale is high. This was evident from my discussion with middle leaders and newly qualified teachers. Staff understand the school's priorities and the actions that leaders are taking to improve the quality of pupils' education further. Staff are appreciative of the training and development opportunities available to them, many of which are helping to refine and develop their leadership skills. They are appreciative that senior leaders help them to maintain a healthy work-life balance. Effective mentoring means that new teachers to the school are well supported in their role.

Pupils' personal development is central to the ethos of the school. Pupils work hard and behave very well. They enjoy the range of roles and responsibilities that they are given. They are proud of their school, which they feel is a caring place where they are safe and challenged to do their best.

The previous inspection report asked leaders to improve the quality of outdoor provision for children in the Reception class. Your actions to address this have been very successful. Children enjoy participating in a range of well-planned activities that follow their interests and promote their early reading, writing and mathematical development. They are active and independent learners. These improvements have, in part, led to an upward trend in outcomes at the end of early years, and the proportion of children reaching a good level of development has risen consistently. It is now close to national average.

Leaders were also asked to improve the consistency of teaching across the school to ensure that all pupils make at least good progress. You have created an effective teaching and learning team. Inspection evidence, including work in pupils' books and conversations with pupils, shows that the majority of pupils currently in the school are now making at least good progress.

Parents and carers are on the whole supportive of the school. Several parents with whom I spoke and the vast majority of those who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, told me that communication with the school was good and that they were happy with the school. A small minority of parents felt that more could be done to ensure that pupils were better prepared for the change from the early years to key stage 1. This is an area that you have worked on. I found no evidence to suggest that transition into key stage 1 was an area of concern.

Safeguarding is effective.

You have ensured that all the arrangements for safeguarding are fit for purpose. Staff and governors take their roles seriously and keep up to date with regular training. Staff are informed of changes swiftly, and you carry out effective checks to make sure staff understand the school's safeguarding policies. Staff training, including that for new members of staff, is effective and ensures that they have a good awareness of their responsibilities. There is a positive culture for keeping pupils safe.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to keep themselves safe. They understand the dangers associated with internet use and know how important it is to keep themselves safe online. The curriculum provides plenty of opportunities for pupils to learn about danger. During the inspection, pupils spoke about how they are taught to be safe in and outside school. They know about bullying and are certain that, should it occur, staff would deal with it effectively. The school's website contains useful advice for parents about cyberbullying.

Inspection findings

- During the inspection I followed a number of lines of enquiry. Firstly, I considered how well teaching ensured that pupils were able to achieve well across the curriculum. Pupils' attainment at the end of key stage 2 has improved considerably over the last three years in reading, writing and mathematics. Progress for almost all pupils by the end of key stage 2 is well above the national average in these subjects. The proportion of pupils reaching the higher standards in reading, writing and mathematics in 2018 was more than double the national average.
- There is a strong emphasis on improving the teaching of reading, writing and mathematics across the school. Scrutiny of pupils' English and mathematics books showed that their work continues to be of a high standard. However, pupils' work in books in some other subject areas is not of the same quality. This was particularly true for the work of the most able pupils. Sometimes the work they receive, in subjects other than English and mathematics, does not sufficiently challenge their thinking, or require them to use the higher-order skills that they have developed in areas such as reading and reasoning. On other occasions, most-able pupils are given more challenging activities but are then not given enough time to gain the maximum benefit from completing the tasks.
- My second area of focus was on the school's curriculum. You and your fellow leaders have improved the overall content of all subjects taught at the school, and the curriculum is broad and well-balanced. Pupils benefit from going on a range of school trips. They also enjoy taking part in school activities, such as music and drama, which are led by specialist providers. Leaders of subjects beyond English and mathematics know their subjects well. They plan for improvement in their subject areas. However, they have not had sufficient opportunity to make sure that the quality of teaching and learning in their subjects is as good as it might be.
- My final line of enquiry looked at the quality of provision in key stage 1. Pupils' attainment in key stage 1 was mixed in 2018. Standards in reading, writing and mathematics at the end of Year 2 were below average. However, the proportion of pupils who achieved the expected standard in the Year 1 phonics check improved. This was in line with the national average.
- You and your leadership colleagues recognised that there was scope for improvement in key stage 1. You started by identifying the particular barriers to learning that many pupils in key stage 1 were coming up against. The effective work being done in early years to develop children's language skills and vocabulary is now being followed up more effectively. For example, you have put new systems in place for improving pupils' writing and reading by developing a rich tapestry of experiences for pupils to draw on when writing and to relate to in their reading. These changes are having a positive

impact. The work that I saw in pupils' books, and pupils' responses in the lessons that I visited, demonstrated that the majority of pupils are now making good progress across key stage 1.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- current improvements in key stage 1 are embedded so that pupils are appropriately challenged and make consistently good progress
- subject leaders, other than in mathematics and English, are able to have a greater impact on the quality of teaching and learning in their areas of responsibility
- pupils, particularly the most able, are provided with greater challenge and more opportunities to apply their high-level skills across a range of curriculum subjects.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the director of education for the Diocese of Liverpool, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Wigan. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Michael Tonge
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

During the inspection, I met with you, the senior leadership team, the business manager, middle leaders, newly appointed staff and a group of governors. I met with a representative of the local consortium of schools. I observed pupils around the school and in their classes. I visited classes, observed teaching and learning, looked at books and spoke with pupils about their work. I also met with six pupils to seek their views of the school. I met parents at the start of the school day. I took account of the 15 responses to the Ofsted online survey, Parent View, including free-text responses, the eight responses to the pupils' survey and 22 responses to the staff survey.